

And I'm not the only one who has been impressed. Four years ago, public confidence in the federal government was at an all-time low. But you have begun to change that attitude. Even in a time of leaner budgets and smaller staffs, you have improved service to the public, forged effective partnerships with communities and private businesses, and discarded old-fashioned management systems. Now, for the first time in decades, public opinion of federal agencies is markedly on the rise. Congratulations—the credit for this stunning turnaround goes to you.

Vice President Gore and I are excited and optimistic about the prospects for America in the next four years. We are on the right track to the twenty-first century and are picking up speed as we continue to work with you to reinvent government. I believe that our nation will enter that new century stronger, more confident, and more capable than ever before. And I believe that a large part of that success will be achieved because of the energy and talent of each of you—the men and women of the federal government.

Thank you for all you do on behalf of your fellow Americans.

Bill Clinton

**Remarks Prior to Discussions With
Prime Minister Viktor
Chernomyrdin of Russia and an
Exchange With Reporters
February 7, 1997**

The President. I want to welcome Prime Minister Chernomyrdin to the White House and thank him for the work that he and the Vice President have done over the last couple of days dealing with the issues involving the relationships of Russia and the United States and NATO and Russia and a number of other issues. And I want to thank them for the work they've done to prepare the way for my meeting with President Yeltsin in Helsinki on March 20th and 21st.

And I also want to thank President Ahtisaari of Finland for hosting us at that meeting. I'm looking forward to it. It will be very important, and I feel quite optimistic about it because of the good relationships I've always had with President Yeltsin and

because of the work that the Prime Minister and the Vice President have done.

Helsinki Summit and NATO Expansion

Q. Two questions, Mr. President. Number one, was Helsinki chosen to accommodate the health of President Yeltsin? And two, how do you convince the President and Mr. Chernomyrdin that NATO expansion is not the threat that they seem to think it is?

The President. Well, first of all, Helsinki was decided upon for a number of reasons, but it worked well for both of us, and I feel good about it. I'm looking forward to going back there.

Q. Was health one of the reasons?

The President. Secondly, we just have started our meeting here, but I think you have to see this issue in the context of our—all American-Russian relations and the fact that Russia has emerged as a great democratic nation with such strong sense of partnership with the European countries. The best evidence of that is what we're all doing together in Bosnia today—for our partnership there.

Juvenile Crime

Q. Mr. President, one of the global issues on the forefront today is also the CDC report on suicide and homicide among juveniles. How do you react to the fact that the United States is leading the richest nations among homicides and suicides among 15-year-olds and under?

The President. I'm very concerned about it, and we're working on it. That's one of the reasons that I made such a big issue of juvenile crime and violence in the State of the Union. There is some indication that it is going down now, after years and years and years of exploding. The last figures we have for 1995 were somewhat encouraging.

But it is—it's an unacceptable condition. And we have too many children out there raising themselves on our streets, too many children who have not been embraced by their communities, who can't get what they need in their own families. And we have to—the rest of us have to do better. And a big part of what I hope we can work together on with the Congress is the whole juvenile justice package, which I think will be passed

and then fully implemented, along with the community efforts that are going on in places like Boston, which is a good model, where there hasn't been a single juvenile homicide in 18 months, I think, in a long time.

If we can learn from what's working out there, we can turn this around. But we ought to be sensitive about it, not only because we don't rank well compared to all of the nations but because it means we're losing too many of our children.

Q. Were you shocked by it?

The President. No. I'm shocked by—I was shocked, but not surprised, because I knew that we would have the worst record on this.

1998 Budget

Q. Senator Lott says he is greatly depressed by your budget proposal. What did you think about that?

The President. Well, I had a good visit with him today; I'm trying to put him in a better frame of mind about it. We know that from the last 2 years that they have different priorities than I do in balancing the budget. But the American people should remember this administration has a record now; we've cut the deficit by 63 percent. We're serious about balancing the budget, but we think we have to do it in a way that protects our values and invests in our future.

If the charge is that I have invested more in education and in the health and welfare of poor children in this country, then that's a charge I'm guilty of. I did—I presented a budget that invested a lot more in education and in the health and welfare of poor children, and I'm guilty of that. But I think that's good for America, to make it stronger, and we'll still balance the budget.

Q. Did you talk to Senator Lott—

The President. Let me just make one more comment on that. We are just beginning this process, and I took no offense about what he said today. I'm very encouraged by the remarks that have been made by the House leaders and the Senate leaders in the budget process. I think he thinks that maybe there's a bigger difference between us, and we'll have to work harder, but we always knew we were going to have to work hard

to reconcile the differences between us. We can do this.

But if you look at the differences between us and you look at how close we are to a balanced budget, we can do it, and I'm convinced we will do it. And I think what I want to do is make sure we do it in a way that's best for the American people and deals with this enormous problem we have, especially of our young people—giving them the right kind of education, keeping them out of trouble, giving them decent health care and—because I don't want to have to keep reading years from now the kind of rankings that were just quoted to me from the CDC.

[At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.]

Prime Minister Chernomyrdin's Visit

The President. First, let me say that we are honored to welcome Prime Minister Chernomyrdin back to Washington. And I very much appreciate the work that he and the Vice President have done and will do after this meeting on issues between our two countries. And I'm especially grateful that they worked out a time for President Yeltsin and me to meet in Helsinki on March 20th and 21st. I thank President Ahtisaari for agreeing to host us, and I'm delighted to be going back to Helsinki and very, very anxious to have my meeting with President Yeltsin.

Russia and NATO

Q. Mr. President, would you agree to sign a legal binding agreement with Russia on European security guarantees?

The President. Well, I believe that we ought to work out an agreement between NATO and Russia—the United States, which ensures that Russia will have a leading role in European security affairs. There are all kinds of—the question you asked me and the way you ask it leaves a lot of landmines open there. I believe that we can work out an agreement that will be sufficiently satisfactory to both parties, that we can get that.

But I don't want to say yes to the question you ask because that would imply things which might make any agreement we could reach meaningless. We want a meaningful agreement that is signed and public and that

the parties feel bound to but that actually means something.

Five Nation Summit

Q. Mr. President, would you like to go to Paris to that summit of five nations? Looks like Russia supports that, the French, the Germans.

The President. First of all, I want to have my meeting with President Yeltsin. I think that's the most important thing. We have to meet first. Chancellor Kohl has been to see President Yeltsin. President Chirac's seen him. And I haven't seen him in several months, and I'm anxious to see him. We've talked on the phone, but I want to have a meeting first. And before we all get together we need to be very clear on what it is we'll be discussing and what we expect the results to be. So I want to defer a decision on that until I have a chance to have my visit with President Yeltsin.

Helsinki Summit and NATO Expansion

Q. Mr. President, can the summit in Helsinki influence in any way the timetable of the NATO expansion?

The President. Well, we intend to have our meeting in the summertime and make the decisions that we have agreed already to make on that. That's a decision that's already been made by NATO. But what I think that the summit in Helsinki can do is to make it clear that no one has any intention of providing any increased threat to the security of Russia.

I have worked very hard for 4 years to elevate the role of Russia in the international forums, in the economic forums like the G-7, in security partnerships like the remarkable partnership we have in Bosnia. I'm convinced that the operation in Bosnia would not have the credibility it does today if you didn't have Russia and the United States and the European parties in there.

My whole vision of the future is a partnership of all of Europe's democracies, obviously including Russia, as I said in my State of the Union Address. So I think we'll be able to talk about that and make some real progress.

The Vice President. And we're going to have a discussion in here in just a minute, so you need to give them a chance. [Laugh-

ter]. They're going to do a press conference——

[At this point, a question was asked in Russian, and a translation was not provided.]

Prime Minister Chernomyrdin. It's a step forward—[inaudible]—express the importance for the meeting with the President and the President of Russia. It will be one of the critical stages in terms of—[inaudible]—in Europe. The upcoming summit, and the questions [inaudible]—a wide range, and the decisions will be extremely important for the relationship between our two countries and for European security as well, as well as for the arms control, for economic questions.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Boris Yeltsin of Russia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the National Economy and the Fiscal Year 1998 Budget

February 7, 1997

Today we learned that during the full 4 years of my first term, the economy added 11.5 million new jobs—the first time any administration has ever created more than 11 million jobs and well above the 8 million new jobs I had set as our goal. The combined rate of unemployment and inflation was lower than during any other administration since Lyndon Johnson was President. And the deficit fell by 63 percent, from \$290 billion in 1992 to \$107 billion in 1996. Now we must continue our work of balancing the budget while investing in people. The budget I released yesterday will balance the budget by 2002, contributing to continued strong growth with low inflation. I look forward to working with congressional leaders to pass a balanced budget that maintains our crucial investments in education and training.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting on Cyprus

February 7, 1997

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. Chairman:)

In accordance with Public Law 95-384 (22 U.S.C. 2373(c)), I submit to you this report